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LOGISTICS AND THE CHINESE COMMUNIST INTERVENTION DURING THE KOREAN CONFLICT (1950-1953)

BY

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LOGISTICS AND THE CHINESE COMMUNIST INTERVENTION

DURING THE KOREAN CONFLICT (1950-1953)

INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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Introduction

This paper is a compilation of data related to logistical operations during the two major United Nations (UN) withdrawals that occurred as a result of the Communist Chinese intervention into the Korean conflict (1950-1953). The data primarily deals with the psychological climate and the logistical situation just prior to the Chinese Communist intervention and the tremendous logistical efforts required during the withdrawal.

Background

General Douglas MacArthur's masterstroke at Inchon led to the desired disintegration of the North Korean People's Army (NKPA). That Army, already overextended, collapsed between the counteroffensive of the Eighth Army from the Naktong line to the south and the attack of the X Corps from the north on its main line of communication. After the Inchon landing, General Douglas MacArthur, Commander-in-Chief, United Nations Command, recaptured South Korea, driving the Communists north and then advanced across the 38th parallel into North Korea almost without resistance.

The fall of Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, was almost anticlimactic. On October 14 the UN forces broke Pyongyang's defensive lines, throwing the NKPA into utter confusion. The UN forces came at the Korean Communists seemingly from every direction. By October 20, Major General Charles A. Willoughby, MacArthur's G-2 (Intelligence) Officer, effectively announced the end of the war. The UN advance was so rapid, the NKPA route so complete, that on October 24 MacArthur issued another directive effectively making the Yalu River his new--and he hoped final--objective line.

The important role of logistics was demonstrated when the plans were laid for the concerted attack by the Eighth Army and the I Corps to drive to the Yalu River. Eighth Army units were operating with only one day of ammunition on hand, one and one-half of PCL, and three-to-four days of Class I supplies. The Army commander could not improve this dangerous supply situation with his transportation capability limited by the primitive road net and the meager rail system. The Eighth Army had literally outrun its logistical support. As a result, the planned offensive to the Yalu was delayed until November 24, 1950. The Commander-in-Chief, United Nations Command, in a message to the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Washington, D.C., emphasized that the delay in mounting the offensive was entirely due to logistical difficulties.

Psychological Climate

Now, with victory apparently in sight, what Army historian Roy Appleman called "cutback fever"¹ appeared everywhere. The Department of the Army talked with MacArthur about returning Eighth Army troop units to the United States or to Europe. On October 25 the Pentagon told MacArthur it was canceling shipments of troops to Korea scheduled for October and November, except for 17,000 noncommissioned officers. MacArthur did not object. In the Far East Command itself, Lieutenant General Walton H. Walker, only a few weeks earlier desperately pleading for ammunition, told MacArthur he now had enough and that henceforth munition ships from the United States should be diverted to Japan. Major General Walter L. Weible, commanding the Japan Logistical Command, told his counterpart in San Francisco to cancel any outstanding requisitions for ground ammunition and to unload any ships still in port. X Corps circulated a planning document calling for a single American

division, the 3d Infantry, to remain in Korea; everyone else would leave. Troops of the 1st Cavalry Division were the most optimistic of all. They talked of parading on Thanksgiving Day in Tokyo wearing their favored yellow scarves. Some units even began turning in equipment in preparation for the trip home.

The Logistical Situation

The UN advance into North Korea by the Eighth Army had begun under great logistical difficulties and was supported on the narrowest margin.² On October 10, the day after the attack across the 38th Parallel began, Major General Frank W. Milburn was distressed by the logistical situation of I Corps. He felt that at least 3,000 tons of balanced stocks should be in the Kaesong ammunition supply points. But he was informed that this could not be done unless all the truck companies in the Eighth Army were diverted to that task. This inadequate supply situation existed because during the first half of October, unloading activities at Inchon for Eighth Army were negligible. Practically all the port capabilities at that time were engaged in mounting out the 1st Marine Division for the Wonson Operation. Levels of certain supplies for I Corps were at times reduced to one day, and only selective unloading enabled the supply sections to meet troop requirements. Most combat vehicles, such as tanks, operated in the forward zone without knowing whether they would have enough fuel at hand to continue the attack the next day.³

Because it could not support any more troops north of the Han River at the time, the Eighth Army was compelled to undertake the advance north of the 38th Parallel with only I Corps, leaving the IX Corps behind.⁴

On October 19, the Army forward distributing point was at Kaesong. For most units, this meant trucking supplies more than a hundred miles. Even

with good roads, this would be a difficult logistical situation and roads in Korea were far from that. During this time the Eighth Army used about 200 trucks daily to transport food, gasoline, and lubricants to dumps fifty miles north of Seoul. A pipeline, completed in October, carried aviation gasoline from Inchon to Kimpo Airfield and helped immensely in supplying planes with fuel.⁵

The solution to Eighth Army's logistical problems rested in the last analysis on the railroads. Airlift and long-distance trucking were emergency measures only. They could not supply an army for offensive operations several hundred miles from its railhead.

At the end of September, rail communications for the Eighth Army did not extend beyond the old Pusan perimeter. Yet the Army itself was at the Han River, 200 miles northward. Because of the resulting logistical situation, the repair of the rail line was of the greatest importance. And the reconstruction of the railroad bridges over the major rivers constituted the greatest single problem. It was not until October 21 that a shoofly bridge carried rail traffic across the Han River into Seoul.⁶

But even after trains crossed into Seoul, they could proceed only as far as Mun-san-ni on the south bank of the Tonjin River. This was still 200 miles below the Eighth Army front at the Chongchon River in late October. Thus, at that time the railhead was still as many miles south of the Eighth Army front as it was a month earlier when the front was in the Seoul area and the railhead was at Waegwan. As a generalization, it may be said that the railhead lagged 200 miles behind the Eighth Army front in October 1950.

Repair of the major highway bridges presented a problem just as pressing as the repairs of the rail bridges. In some respects it was an even more immediate problem because, in general, the highway bridges could be repaired

faster, and thus were the first used to keep supplies moving forward to the troops. The 207-foot span break in the Nakdong River highway bridge at Waegwan was closed with pile bents and a 100-foot triple single-panel Bailey bridge. The FEAF Combat Cargo Command made seventy C-119 flights to fly in a pontoon bridge from Japan to provide a vehicular bridge across the Han River at Seoul.⁷

At every turn in the operations in North Korea during October, Eighth Army's effort was limited by an adverse logistical situation. And it must be borne in mind that the Eighth Army's troops had almost reached the North Korean capitol of Pyongyang before it could get any supplies through the port of Inchon, where facilities were still devoted exclusively to outloading the X Corps.⁸

The Withdrawals

There were two major periods of UN withdrawals during the Korean conflict-- December 1950 and April 1951. The first rearward move was considerable more extensive than the second. Comparisons clearly reveal that the same problems arising during the earlier withdrawal were reduced or avoided in the second.

The December Withdrawal

With the advance of UN forces into North Korea, large quantities of supplies had been moved forward through the ports on either coast of Korea. However, this rapid movement of UN forces was abruptly halted when the Chinese bent back the prongs of the UN with their November 24th attack. The change in the tactical situation reflected itself in the logistical situation. The Chinese offensive threw the entire logistical situation in reverse. For the next two months, it was a matter of withdrawing in the face of the onslaught, taking along all possible supplies and equipment.⁹

During the period 9-24 December, more than 200,000 military and civilian personnel, 350,000 measurement tons of supplies and 17,500 vehicles were outloaded by water at the northeast Korean ports and transported to South Korea. Supplies evacuated from northern Korea literally poured into Pusan, adding to supplies arriving from Japan and the United States which had been scheduled for unloading at northern ports as well as at Pusan. Practically all supplies and equipment in the Inchon area were also evacuated with the exception of bulky items and fixed installations.

However, during the initial attack by the Chinese, no stocks were endangered, except in the most forward areas as Sinanjin and Kumui-Pi. The Kuniu-Ri supply points came under fire before all ammunition could be withdrawn. The bulk of UN supplies were located at Pyongyang and Shinnampo. The rapid rearward movement from these areas dictated that the removal of supplies had to be accomplished in a minimum amount of time. This caused multiple problems. UN troops were not psychologically prepared for such retrograde operations.¹⁰ It was not until UN forces reached Sariwon that this condition ended.

Physical characteristics of Pyongyang itself created difficulties. With the city separated by the Taedong River, it was necessary to set up two supply points. The supply point was located on the south side of the city for cargo arriving by rail and air from the south and the other across the river for cargo arriving from Chammampo. Supplies trucked between these two cities could be reached over pontoon bridges only.

Transportation of supplies and equipment was probably the most difficult phase of the entire operation. Supplies and replacement equipment had to be moved northward and kept forward for support of the day-to-day requirements, while all excesses had to be moved southward and kept far enough back to be out of danger of loss to the onrushing enemy; yet these supplies and equipment had

to be echeloned in depth and placed so as to be available to the Army as it moved south. This required relocation of supply points, leapfrogging of supplies and service units, shuttling of transportation truck units, and evacuation of all items that were of value as salvage. Supply had to be maintained on a slim, marginal basis, since stocks could not be built up at any place in forward areas, or in places which might soon become forward areas.¹¹

Rail transportation was severely limited. Pyongyang railyards contained more loaded rail cars than could possibly be handled by the locomotives available. However, even if sufficient power had been available, the inadequate capacity of the rail lines would have prohibited full use.¹²

The absence of sufficient rail transportation and the fluid tactical situation caused a greater demand on all available trucks and at a time when weather conditions made it most difficult to use it. Also, troop reinforcements coming into Pyongyang had to be moved northward by truck, for the limited rail facilities north of the Taedong River were taxed to the utmost in supply of forward elements. Thus fewer trucks were available for supply evacuation.¹³

Air transportation from Kimpo was used principally for the evacuation of wounded and movement of air force units to the rear.¹⁴

When the tactical situation reversed, it was such a rapid development that, despite exploitation of every available means of transportation, it was impossible to remove all supplies in the time available. The weeks taken to transport supplies to this area by rail and air could not be compacted into a few days for the evacuation of these supplies. The logistical situation was so sorely pressed that 8 to 10,000 tons of supplies and equipment were lost.

In addition to the removal of supplies, the evacuation of wounded, troop units and other UN personnel had to be accomplished. Naturally, these groups were given the highest priority.

The same difficulties which characterized the evacuation of Pyongyang presented themselves at Shinnampo. There were no rail lines to the south of Shinnampo and few trucks were available for movement of supplies to the docks. The extreme total range showed the evacuation process. However, when the proximity of enemy forces made the port untenable and forced a halt to operations, only negligible quantities of equipment and supplies had to be destroyed.¹⁵

Shortly after the withdrawal from Pyongyang, it became clear that supplies at Inchon, Ascom City, and Yongdungpo would have to be reduced as rapidly as possible. The railyards at Yongdungpo were cleared to receive supplies and equipment still north of the Han River. Due to the limited capacity of the railroad bridge at Seoul, it was necessary to start this move early.

The stocks at Inchon, Ascom City, and Yongdungpo were rapidly reduced in order of priority established at EUSAK G-4. Evacuation by rail and water continued until, by the end of December, the only remaining supplies and equipment consisted primarily of engineer bridge and railroad supplies and some quantities of lumber. A limited supply of POL products and 1,000 tons of ammunition remained in the ASP at Ascom City with the expectation that it would be issued prior to evacuation of the area.¹⁶

Other than supplies that could readily be moved by truck, ASP's were moved south of the Han River, and supply points moved south with backup stocks of Classes I, III, and V established along the railroad to the rear. The yards at Yongdungpo had been cleared, leaving only those trains carrying essential supplies and certain personnel.¹⁷

By 5 January, the final evacuation of the Seoul-Inchon area was completed. Three trains of noncritical supplies, a small amount of medical supplies and considerable POL at Kimpo, and some ammunition at Ascom City had to be destroyed.

The April Withdrawal

In February the UN forces resumed the offensive and until 22 April, the principal logistical operation was to keep supply installations within reach of the slow but steady advance.¹⁸

During this same period, The Eighth United States Army Korea (EUSAK) was busy preparing for further Chinese Communist actions. Particular consideration focused on three possibilities. The first was the inevitable Chinese spring offensive. There was no doubt that it would come. The unknowns were the time and place of the attack. The second consideration involved the enemies' air capabilities. EUSAK knew that the Chinese had a large concentration of aircraft poised above the Yalu River. The possibility of the Chinese using these aircraft in the campaign caused grave concern. The third possibility was the chance of heavy rainfall.¹⁹

To minimize the effects of the interruption of supply lines by enemy ground and air activity or heavy rainfall, corps and divisions were authorized to stockpile I, III, and V supplies at a five-day level.²⁰

On 23 April, following an intense artillery preparation, the enemy launched heavy attacks across the entire western half of the line from Munsan-ni to the Huachon Reservoir.²¹

Communist forces again threatened Seoul. However, well-executed withdrawals with the objective of disrupting the Chinese effort by lengthening their supply lines forestalled the main Communist offensive. The deep withdrawals had so weakened the Chinese supply effort and strengthened the position of EUSAK that by 29 April, intensity of the enemy spring offensive abated.

Logistically, the Eighth Army was well prepared for the Chinese spring offensive. They had planned for such an enemy offensive since February. As a result, it can generally be said that UN forces were well supplied with all

classes of supplies while defending from prepared positions against the Chinese onslaught.

When the strategic withdrawal was ordered, supplies were moved southward to predetermined locations.²² Basically the operation consisted of:

1. Ammunition supply points north of the Han River at Uijongbu and Chongyang-Ni were closed. Two days' supplies of Class V were held at Simung during the withdrawal; an ammunition supply point with a two-day level was opened at Pyongjom, and in Seoul, a two-day supply of artillery ammunition was kept on rail cars as a mobile ammunition supply point.

2. Class I and III stocks at Yongdungpo were reduced to two days. This was augmented by a Class III supply point at Osan with a five-day authorized level. These classes of supplies were further augmented by supply points at Chonan and Taejon, both with an authorized two-day level of supplies. Additionally, these stocks were backed up by ammunition and POL from beach operations at Inchon.

3. Stocks of I, III and V supplies at Hongchon were reduced to not more than two days. These were augmented by three days of these stocks at Wonju; a three-day level at Chechon; and a two-day regulating supply point at Andong.

4. Construction of rail lines and bridges north of and over the Han River ceased.²³ All engineers' construction equipment and material were moved south. Salvage vehicles in forward areas were evacuated as soon as feasibly possible.²⁴

Plans were made in April to establish depots in the Inchon area with a ten-day supply level, but the general withdrawal forced a reduction of activities at the port and postponement of the planned depot operations. Because of the proximity of the enemy to the port of Inchon, all ammunition, POL and

grain were quickly moved to supply points in the vicinity of Yongdungpo, Suwon and Osan. All other cargo in the port area, including salvage vehicles, were backloaded on to ships. Except for one ammunition ship and one POL ship held in the harbor for discharge as required, all loaded vessels were diverted to Pusan. All vessels en route to Inchon were diverted, with the exception of urgently needed cargo. LST's were held on stand-by to outload the 2d Engineer Special Brigade with all its equipment and 10,000 indigenous personnel. By the end of the month, rail and backloading had essentially cleared the port of cargo. UN lines had again become stabilized, and supply installations and operations began to return to normal.²⁵

Many logistical difficulties occurred during the April withdrawal. Buildups, backhands, rail embargos in favor of ammunition, rations, indigenous personnel, and warm weather problems were experienced. Nonetheless, preparation and planning reduced or avoided many of the problems encountered in the December withdrawal.²⁶

Buildup

A Class I buildup of forward supply points had started 1 April in preparation for the anticipated Communist spring offensive. The buildup was aimed at achieving the new authorized supply levels at forward supply points--five to eight days at forward supply points to support the camp and a four-day level at backup points.

However, the start of the CCF offensive on 23 April called a halt to the buildup. Stocks at Yongdongpo and Hongchon were backhauled to Suwon, Chonan, and Ronijon. Also, 300,000 rations just unloaded at Inchon were backloaded.²⁷ With the cessation of the buildup program, the daily telegram for supplies was reinstituted on 29 April. However, by the time the long anticipated offensive came, the buildup was just about completed.²⁸

Indigenous Labor

Control and utilization of indigenous labor continued to be a major problem. Poor wages and a high inflation rate directly contributed to the dilemma. Daily wages of the Korean laborer were insufficient to provide for daily needs and the ever-increasing inflation rate multiplied the problem. As a result, labor turnover was high; absenteeism, specially in bad weather, was a real problem; cargo shipments were unbalanced and damaged; and pilferage, especially of subsistence items, occurred regularly. In some cases, entire truckloads disappeared.

To curb these difficulties, military security was increased and the military police authority. Notification of dispatched and arrival times were made to receiving units. "Honchos" or gang bosses were made responsible for the acts of their individual group.²⁹ With all its problems, the employment of indigenous labor was the only solution to the heavy workload at supply installations.

Summer Clothing

Experience demonstrated that the issue of a complete clothing allowance was a burden to the soldier. Its bulk and weight impaired his mobility and drained his energy. As a remedy, the soldier discarded what was considered unnecessary equipment. This abandonment of equipment snowballed and created a tremendous strain on resupply. It hampered an already overtaxed supply, transportation, and salvage system.

Consequently, commanders were informed that it was no longer mandatory to issue full clothing allowances. They were authorized to withhold items in reserve until actually needed.³⁰

Class II and IV

As fighting moved northward prior to the Chinese Communist April offensive, the Eighth Army was required to augment its longer supply lines. The

55th Quartermaster Base Depot at Pusan had the initial quartermaster Class II and IV support mission for all Eighth Army units. The result was a tremendously large number of accounts handled by the depot. It also placed a large burden on requisitioning units to pick up supplies. Divisions had the capability to truck and receive shipments at their Class II and IV supply points, but non-divisional units had to send trucks to Pusan to draw supplies.

The problem was alleviated in May with the establishment of two non-divisional Army Class II and IV supply points. The supply point at Suwan supported non-divisional troops in the I Corps sector and the supply point at Chechon supported non-divisional units in the IX and X Corps sectors.³¹

In addition to the two supply points established for Army non-divisional troops in the Corps sectors, a Class II and IV supply point was established at Taegu. Units south of the Taejin-Andong line, except those in the Pusan area, were directed to draw from the Taegu supply point. Units in the Pusan area continued to draw supplies from Pusan.

Air Force requirements were consolidated by Air Force base units and submitted to the nearest Class II and IV supply point.

These procedures gave the depot the advantage of shipping forward in bulk to supply points. Units that formerly made the long trip to Pusan with vitally needed organic transportation had one of their most pressing supply and transportation problems reduced considerably.

Class III

At the direction of the Army commander, Class III supply levels were built up in anticipation of the CCF offensive that finally started on 22 April. Forward Class III supply points at Yongdung-po and Suwan held the authorized five-day supply, backed up by two days of supply at back-up points. On 26 April the Kaman-ri petroleum terminal loaded two convoys

totalling 82 trucks with diesel and mogas to replenish Eighth Army forward supply points which had been depleted when the enemy launched their offensive. In the first stages of the offensive, some of the forward supply points were threatened, necessitating the backhauling of some stocks.

In the early part of May, division POL requirements declined and as the enemy offensive gained momentum, G-4 directed that stocks on the ground at Inchon be depleted and that only enough POL be offloaded to make up division trains. Therefore, it was necessary to cancel and divert some of the vessels originally scheduled to this port. The port of Ulsan furnished the bulk of mogas for the eastern sector from the POL terminal at Pusan. On 16 May, the Quartermaster Petroleum Officer was notified by G-4 that a three-day embargo had been placed on all rail shipments except Class V. During the latter part of May, when the UN forces began their counteroffensive, VII requirements sharply increased and it was necessary to expedite vessels back into the port of Inchon to meet these increased demands.

In view of the continued difficulties encountered in distributing POL to forward units, consideration was given during this campaign to construction of a pipeline system. During the UN counteroffensive which started late in January, distribution of gasoline had been an acute problem. For one thing, the rail net and its switching facilities and rolling stock were generally inadequate. At times of peak tactical activity, shipment priorities had to be given to other classes of supply. Port facilities were also crowded and taxed beyond their capabilities.³²

Additionally, quality control checks of captured enemy fuel and oil showed that both were well below acceptable grade levels for use in UN vehicles and machinery. The octane level of most captured fuel was below 60, and the oil contained large amounts of water and sediment.³³

As a precaution against enemy air attacks, a program was in full swing in April to move all Class III dumps away from rail lines; keep them well dispersed; and build sand or earth revetments between the rows of POL drums.

Observations

A comparison of the logistical situation during the December 1950 and the April 1951 withdrawals clearly reveals that readiness was the key distinguishing ingredient. There was no logistical planning and preparation for such an offensive prior to the December withdrawal. U.N. forces met little resistance from the Korean People's Army and the threat from the Communist Chinese was disregarded. As a result, when the tactical situation reversed, an already difficult logistical situation turned into turmoil.

On the other hand, the U.N. forces were well prepared logistically for the Communist Chinese April offensive. They had been planning for such an offensive as early as February. Indeed, planning did not eliminate all the logistical difficulties. Rail facilities remained inadequate, road conditions continued to be poor, and many other problems were encountered. Nonetheless, preparations and planning considerably reduced or avoided many of the problems experienced in the earlier withdrawal.

Endnotes

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